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ABSTRACT

Observations of the Director of Libraries at Clarion State College, Pennsylvania, are presented on issues confronting academic libraries in the 1980's in two categories: constant or diminishing financial support, and increasing patron demand for services. Library materials and operating budgets, interlibrary cooperation, resource sharing, automation, staff size and development, and community support of academic libraries are mentioned in connection with library fiscal management. Access to library materials, computer-assisted literature searching, interlibrary loan services, preservation of library materials, staff development, and new library technology are noted as important considerations in dealing with increased library usage. (ESR)

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Issues Facing Academic Libraries in the 1980's

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ABSTRACT

The author presents his views of a few significant issues facing academic libraries in this decade. The issues are seen in two broad categories, financial support, and increased use of libraries by patrons.

PREFACE

The author was Director of University Libraries at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond from August 1970 until June 1982. On July 1, 1982, he was appointed Director of Libraries at Clarion State College, Pennsylvania.

Recently, I was asked my views concerning major issues facing academic libraries in the 1980's. Other library administrators may have other issues in mind than the ones I discuss here. These are my thoughts.

Librarians agree that a number of critical issues face academic libraries in the 1980's. For this short paper I have arranged my views under two broad headings; financial support and patron demand for services. I see one of these remaining somewhat constant or even diminishing and the other increasing. For each I am including subheadings, some of which are similar or identical because either issue justifies their inclusion and discussion, though the emphasis may vary depending upon the main topic.

Financial Support

Materials Budget
Operating Budget
Interlibrary Cooperation
Resource Sharing
Staff Size
Automation
Community Support
Staff Development

Patron Demand for Services

Accessing Material
Computer Assisted Literature Searching
Resource Sharing
Preservation
Staff Development and New Technology

Financial Support

The general theme concerning financial support for the 1980's in higher education today is that budgets will tend to remain constant, almost static; even with an added inflation factor, increases will be modest. The emphasis will be on receiving greater value for every dollar expended. Fiscal management on a sound and productive basis will be required of every library administrator.

Materials Budget

This segment of a library budget receives the most attention and deservedly so. The welfare of all academic programs and scholarly research efforts depends upon a strong materials budget, capable of providing the current materials essential to the teaching effort, and sustaining investigative efforts

of faculty, graduate students and others engaged in some form of research.

As mentioned in the preceding section even with adjustment for inflation, materials budgets will not be greatly increased during the 1980's. Library growth may prove almost static. It will be necessary to place greater emphasis on collection development, refining policies so that materials acquired are directly pertinent to research, teaching, and other primary missions of an institution.

Operating Budget

There will be greater emphasis on cost effectiveness in all areas, though the purchase of library equipment is the most obvious. Substantial justification will be required in support of expenditures normally included under the operating budget. Growth will be limited and not necessarily adjusted for inflation in every fiscal period. In many institutions, program budgeting will play a major role in the preparation of budget requests and their subsequent defense.

Interlibrary Cooperation

Academic libraries are establishing greater interdependency in all areas where cooperation can be beneficial. This trend must continue and even intensify in those areas where there are obvious advantages. Some of these are identified in other sub-headings. Academic libraries cannot remain aloof from each other in recognizing their common needs or in finding solutions to common problems.

Resource Sharing

Common sense in the face of budgetary restraints dictates that academic libraries work far more closely than ever before in identifying their common collecting grounds, their unique subject specialties, and work collectively to develop their resources for the greater advantage of their patrons. It is important that new means be devised where necessary and that existing means be utilized to the fullest extent possible to create an awareness and knowledge of the holdings of other libraries, thereby improving their accessibility.

Automation

The strengthening of the existing bibliographic networks is critical to the successful performance of academic libraries in the 1980's. Regardless of which particular processing network an academic library is a member, it is important

that these networks be strengthened and that some means for sharing information among them be established. These networks will provide an effective, efficient means of sharing resources when properly used. It is important that greater use of byproducts of such networks be made available and developed where necessary into useful tools. These include, union lists of serials, bibliographic holdings tapes by subject, or any other byproduct or adaptation that will be beneficial to the mission of libraries.

Staff Size

With budget restraints of the magnitude mentioned earlier it is obvious that staff size will remain very controlled. The forecast is for no great increases in the size of academic library staffs. It is important, therefore, that ways in which to enhance the capabilities of library staff be found and developed. An academic library staff is an important resource in itself and in this sense must be given the same attention that is given to the development of the collection and the improvement of service capabilities. This is mentioned further in the next subheading.

Staff Development

Considering anticipated service requirements of the 1980's it is critical that educational and training opportunities be available so that the staff is current and progressive. In terms of operational funding, this is a high priority. With such support and opportunity an academic library staff will remain capable and competent, well able to meet demands from patrons in this decade.

Community Support

Good strong academic libraries are a significant asset to any community, region, or state in which they are located, as indeed, is the institution which they serve. Awareness of the value of this resource must be greatly increased in the community at large. It is interesting to note in discussion with academic librarians the increasing dependency of business and industry on academic libraries. Similarly, this is true of service agencies, professional associations and others as well. Strong community support plays an important role in improving the fiscal capabilities of an academic institution and its libraries. The solution can take several forms. The best known of these is a viable Friends of the Library Group which in keeping with the library's mission of service to its own institution and the community provides support for the acquisition of

useful resource materials, which could not otherwise be acquired, the offering of cultural opportunities not otherwise available; and the general advancement of scholarship. It would be perilous to ignore this; it is critical to the welfare of academic libraries in the years ahead.

Patron Demand For Services

My observation is that patron demand for services from libraries is increasing. These demands arise from all members of the academic community. More adults are enrolling in higher education in pursuit of further training for the completion of degrees, the earning of advanced degrees, or for the advantage of an improved life style. There is much greater interest in the resources of academic libraries today than ever before, and a response is required that is satisfactory in terms of fulfillment of the part of individual patrons.

Accessing Materials

Academic libraries need to develop additional ways for achieving full accessibility of resources to patrons. As the 1970's ended many libraries introduced computer output microform catalogs as a preparation for the eventuality of online catalogs, wherein library materials would be accessible through computer retrieval. Some have added key word indexes providing greater depth of access to special collections. As more patrons turn to academic libraries for the satisfaction of their needs, it is critical that further improvements in accessing collections be made available.

Computer Assisted Literature Searching

Turning again to the question of automation this time in terms of public service, academic libraries as many have, must recognize the critical importance of bibliographic databases and their accessibility for library patrons. Accessing these databases can prove to be very expensive, yet the benefits to patrons is very clear. Ways must be found to improve these services and keep costs under control for the greater advantage of academic library patrons. They are a proven asset and must remain so in terms of accessibility, time consumed and ultimately final cost.

Resource Sharing

Steps were taken as the 1970's ended to improve interlibrary loan services. The introduction of an interlibrary loan component to the OCLC service is recognized as a great benefit. This trend must continue so that regardless of the limitations of any one academic library resources will be available to patrons quickly and at a minimal cost.

Preservation

Many nineteenth century printed materials are deteriorating because of high acid content paper. This is a problem for any large library and a matter for concerted effort by all. Again, cooperation is required. If these materials are to be preserved for future generations of scholars, ways must be found for their preservation. Economical methods of deacidification are necessary. In conjunction with this, alternate methods of availability including microform reproduction, depending on the nature of the material, must be enhanced. This point is, that if material will be damaged in handling and must be preserved for the future for research purposes, alternate means of availability should be identified so that materials can be made available for general or common use and the original preserved for more acute scholarly needs.

Staff Development and New Technology

There is a serious need to develop new technologies, to install these technologies, and to make them serviceable and understandable for library patrons during the 1980's. It is important that staff development again not be overlooked. Academic libraries must develop sound, well thought out plans for the continuing education of their staffs, not only so that these people can keep up with the new technology, but can be responsive to patron requests. Costs for this need not be excessive but it is important in an academic setting where many members of the academic community have access to greatly advanced technology for the performance of their every day work, whether it be teaching, research, or some other academic pursuit, that the library staff have equal access in terms of their own needs so that they can continue to be an effective resource as they have been now and in the past.